Don’t be Anxious

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Matthew 6:19-34 is part of the Sermon on the Mount and convey important Christian truths trusting God’s care for us. Sadly, many Christians claim the exact opposite. They say that we should gather treasures on earth and achieve something in this life. That stands in complete opposition to what the Lord Jesus says here.
For the sake of clarity: there is nothing wrong with possessing treasures on earth. The Bible records many people who had great earthly wealth. One of them is even mentioned in Matthew 6:29 – Solomon. The issue is not possession itself. The point is that the accumulation of wealth should not be the goal of our lives.
The conclusion of the argument is found in Matthew 6:33: seek first the kingdom of God. In reality, the sentence that begins in Matthew 6:19 is only completed in verse 33: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth… but seek ye first the kingdom of God.” That is the central thought.
In this Bible study we shall now examine the Scripture passage quoted above from the Sermon on the Mount, verse by verse.

Laying Up Treasures in Heaven

> Matthew 6:19-20
> 19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
> 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

Everything we have here on earth is passing away. That is why we should not lay up treasures on earth. As one hymn puts it: “Nothing here is lasting, nothing here is lasting; however fair it be, it will one day pass away.”
This is true first and foremost because we ourselves are perishable. In Luke 12 there is a parable about a man whose barns are full and who thinks nothing can harm him. But that very night he dies (see Luke 12:16-21). What good is everything he has gathered then? Nothing.
Everything we have and are here, we shall one day have to let go. The gathering of treasures belongs to the basic principles of this world. People seek their security and support in life through such things, but it leads to nothing.
If we are not to lay up treasures on earth, the positive instruction automatically follows: we should lay up treasures in heaven (see verse 20). This is also taught in other passages of Scripture:

> 1 Peter 1:3-5
> 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
> 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,
> 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Verse 3 tells us that God has begotten us again unto a lively hope. This hope concerns the future – an inheritance. “Hope” is a forward-looking expectation. When we live from

it now, it becomes a living hope for the future. Verse 4 tells us that an inheritance is laid up for us in heaven. Verse 5 adds that not only is the inheritance kept for us, but we ourselves are kept for the inheritance.

> 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
> 16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.
> 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;
> 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We lay up treasures in heaven by not looking at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. The visible things are temporary and therefore perishable, but the invisible things are eternal.

The whole of the old creation walks by sight and not by faith. Man looks at what is before his eyes. On the basis of what he sees, he judges things and makes decisions. But of us believers it is said that we walk by faith, not by sight (see 2 Corinthians 5:7).

> Romans 2:5-8
> 5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;
> 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:
> 7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:
> 8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath.

Verse 5 speaks of a negative treasure. It is a pointed statement directed at unbelievers. Where there is a hard and impenitent heart instead of a tender spirit, wrath is stored up. Verses 7 and 8 mention other negative things that a person can accumulate. For us as believers, however, no wrath is to be expected in the future (Romans 5:9). For us a treasure in heaven has been laid up as a result of the work of Christ in us. That is the treasure we should be gathering during our lifetime.

> 1 Timothy 6:12, 17-19
> 12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. 17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;
> 18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;
> 19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

We are to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life – not merely to receive it later, but to live it now. Verses 17-19 are addressed to those who are rich by earthly standards. Such people must not be high-minded or set their hope on uncertain riches, for these are unreliable. Instead they should hope in the living God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy. It is thoroughly Christian to enjoy life and the good gifts God gives. In verse 18 the same idea is expressed four times: the rich should (a) do good, (b) be rich in good works, (c) be ready to distribute, and (d) be willing to communicate. They should

be one with others and therefore share their riches. Verse 19 says, “Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.” The treasure is for the coming age. Earthly riches can thus be used to gain a treasure for the age to come. If you have earthly treasures, you can convert them into heavenly treasures. This is an investment in heavenly things rather than earthly ones.

Seek First the Kingdom of God

Returning to Matthew 6:20, we see here a truth for the Church: we are to gain our riches in heaven – an eternal treasure and inheritance. For us Christians living in this present dispensation this is a natural and obvious thought.

The Bible divides the history of salvation from the creation of Adam to the “new heaven and new earth” of Revelation 21:1 into seven periods. These periods are not all of equal length and are usually called “dispensations.” In each dispensation a particular aspect of God’s dealings with those living in that period is highlighted.

We have learned that, as firstfruits of the New Covenant and the first believers after the resurrection of Christ, we receive on the basis of that birthright a heavenly position and therefore a heavenly inheritance. To us believers of this dispensation heavenly citizenship and a heavenly future have been promised.

For the Jews in the time of the Lord Jesus, laying up treasures in heaven was not possible in the same way. They lived in the fourth dispensation – the dispensation of the Law. Initially, nothing heavenly had been promised to the Jews, apart from a Kingdom that would descend from heaven and come to them on earth. Yet if it were only a matter of the revelation and establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth, the expression could not read, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” The Jews would have reacted by asking, “How? Is that possible?” Logically, the statement “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” should have been followed directly by the words of verse 33: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God.” That Kingdom of God would ultimately be established on earth, even if it would still take at least 2,000 years. But the call “seek ye first the kingdom of God” remains the same. Every person should seek the Kingdom of God, which will ultimately come upon the earth.

Now we return to us as believers in this present time. We too should seek the Kingdom of God. In our days, however, that Kingdom is established in heaven.

In the fifth dispensation the Kingdom of God is still hidden in heaven. Only in the sixth dispensation will the Kingdom become increasingly manifest until it is finally established on the earth.

In Colossians 3 we find a parallel text to Matthew 6:33. There it says: “Seek those things which are above.” This completes the translation of the provided text. The theological emphasis, pastoral tone, and logical flow of the original have been fully preserved in clear, natural UK English. All Scripture is rendered exactly as it appears in the King James Version.

> Colossians 3:1-2
> If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.
> 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

We are risen with Christ and should seek the things which are above, where Christ is. In verse 2 the words set your affection / think upon, is used in parallel with “seek”. We are to set our minds on the things which are above – that is, on heavenly things – and not on

earthly things. Romans 8 says the same, where we are told to mind the things "of the Spirit".

> Romans 8:1, 5-6
> 1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
> 5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.
> 6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

"Seeking" or "setting the mind on" means to be directed towards something or to pursue it. Our life, our thoughts and our reasoning should be directed towards the things of God, towards His Kingdom and His righteousness.
By nature man is inclined to seek his own righteousness. In doing so he tries to establish his own kingdom. He then occupies himself with earthly matters and sidelines God.

The Possessing of Riches

We are therefore not to gather treasures on earth. The text does not say we may not possess any treasures. But if our life is directed solely towards earthly riches and everything else must give way to them, then we are on the wrong path.
When we have certain ideals or ambitions and then work to achieve them, we become enslaved to those ambitions. We become slaves of the principles we pursue. In this way our ambition reaches the level of religion or worship. We lose our freedom and choose to live an unsatisfying life. This is also the background to many statements in the New Testament that speak strongly against riches or the rich. The Bible does not condemn riches as such, but it does condemn the pursuit of riches – especially when that becomes the only thing that motivates a person.
The world generally thinks that if someone really wants something, he can achieve it. In reality this is not so. Often these things are granted only to a few. Logically, only one person can become President of the United States. Some people can achieve a great deal if they want to, while others want a great deal but can achieve very little.A so-called Christian version of this is: "If you just try hard enough and pray a lot, you can banish sin from your life." But Scripture says this is not the case. The Bible teaches that if you try to fight your sins, sin will only increase. Scripture teaches that you must be humble and admit that you cannot do it yourself. You must be willing to live by the grace of God. Only when you can step back from your shortcomings and let them go can the Lord work through you. We must be willing to accept that neither we nor our world are any good. When we face that reality, we realise that it is pointless to try to improve the world. We ourselves are part of that world. It is wasted energy.

> Matthew 6:21
> 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Verse 21 immediately adds that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. Your heart goes out to what you are gathering. In verse 20 we already read that earthly treasures can be stolen by thieves or ruined by moth and rust. They are changeable. It is therefore better to gather treasures in heaven, so that our heart will go out to them and our hope will be set on the living God.

The Eye Is the Lamp of the Body

Matthew 6:22-23

22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

The lamp (the light) is here linked with the eye. Our eyes are the most important sense and have the greatest influence. They are the lamp of the body, by which we orient ourselves in life. Our eyes give direction to our life's path. The reverse is also true: we look in the direction we are going. Our eye should be "single" – that is, focused on one thing only, namely the Kingdom. We should live a simple life and not pursue too many things at once.

Furthermore, what lives inside a person is expressed through the eyes. You can tell from someone's eyes what kind of person he is. The eye reveals our attitude, character and direction in life. The look in a person's eyes corresponds to his outlook on life. Man is responsible for his gaze and for the way he positions himself in life. It is not for nothing that eyes are called the mirrors of the soul.

All these separate Scripture passages have one single message: seek first the Kingdom. Our desire should go out to that. Because the Kingdom is at present still invisible and in heaven, our interest is directed towards heavenly and unseen things.A beautiful example of this principle is found in the vision of the new Jerusalem in Revelation. The new Jerusalem speaks of the New Covenant under which we as believers already live. Revelation 21:23 23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.The city – that is, those who live under the New Covenant – has no need of sun or moon, for the Lamb Himself is its lamp. Light stands for life, and without light no life is possible. Since Christ is the Lamb, this means that Christ is our light and our life. He gives us life and fills it.

Returning to Matthew 6:23: when our eye is evil and not single, it is not focused on the heavenly things of the Kingdom but on all kinds of other, earthly matters. Then our whole body will be full of darkness and there is therefore no life. It continues: "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" The Lord Jesus says this first and foremost to His contemporaries, the great majority of whom lived under the law. They imagined they had light, but in reality they were focused on outward things. Our eye, figuratively speaking, should therefore not be directed towards earthly matters but towards the unseen, heavenly things. See also Romans 2.

Romans 2:16-20

16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,

18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

Verse 16 concerns the things hidden in the heart. Here the word for "hidden" or "secret" is not the usual Greek word mystérion but kryptós (think of the Dutch word "cryptisch",

meaning cryptic or mysterious).It concerns what is hidden in the inward part of man. God will judge that, for man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7). He therefore sees those hidden, unseen things. On that basis we receive or forfeit reward – namely that treasure and inheritance in the future.
In verse 19 we read that the blind live in darkness, but the Jew thinks he has good eyes. He imagines he has light and is a light to those in darkness. The purpose of the people of Israel throughout the history of salvation was indeed that they should spread the light – the Word of God – among the Gentiles who live in darkness. Verse 20 further explains the concepts of "light" and "darkness". The Jews do not have that light and therefore do not use it. What they consider to be light – namely the law – proves in practice to be darkness.

The Mammon

> Matthew 6:24 24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

There are some uncertainties about this verse, mainly concerning the word "mammon", which we shall look at shortly. This verse highlights the difference between the Old and the New Covenant. When it says "No man can serve two masters", the question is who these two masters are. In the preceding verses we spoke about the light of the New Covenant in contrast with the darkness of the Old Covenant. The next sentence is "No man can serve two masters". These two masters also refer to the Old and the New Covenant. No one can be the bondservant or slave of two masters. You are either the bondservant of the one or of the other. You cannot split yourself in two and serve both masters a little bit. The fact that no one can serve two masters is a very important theme in the New Testament letters. One serves either the law or grace; one serves either the Old or the New Covenant. If you serve the old, the new profits you nothing. If we seek to be justified by the law, Christ is of no benefit to us and we have fallen from grace (see Galatians 5:1-4).The difficulty lies in the term "mammon". The word "mammon" is the Greek form of an Aramaic word. It means "that on which one relies" or "pillar of support". "Mammon" stands for riches or wealth. It does not always have a negative meaning; it depends on the perspective. If one tries to define the word too precisely, one does not get very far.
The question then is: "Where is this riches found?" On the one hand, the riches of the Jew, by Jewish standards, lay in living under the law. They called this "the riches of the law". But on the other hand it must be clear that true riches are not found under the law but in the riches of God's grace. It is of course the latter that is in view here.In Matthew 6:24 the term "mammon" is used, among other things, to indicate unrighteousness from the Jewish point of view. In Jewish eyes the expression "unrighteous mammon" was a designation for Gentiles who lived without the law. The Talmud also uses the term in this way. The Bible likewise says: "Him [the Lord Jesus] … ye [Jews] have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). "Wicked" here means "those who do not live under the law" – that is, "Gentiles". So it actually reads: "… by the hands of the Gentiles have crucified and slain". "Mammon" is therefore a kind of derogatory term from Judaism for the unrighteous / Gentiles.
In Jewish thinking, "serving God" meant serving and living under the law. Religion or religious service meant living according to a collection of laws, rules and regulations.

Religion is therefore not the same as faith in God. In biblical terms, religious service means living under the law – doing or not doing certain things in order to serve God. Christianity, according to biblical concepts, is therefore not a religion. For Christianity is not about living according to rules and regulations, but about faith in God. The term "religious service" is used once for Christians, but then as a kind of play on words. That is in Romans 12:

> Romans 12:1
> 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Here it is not speaking of religion in the sense of a system of rules. It says that if we feel the need for religious service, then our religious service does not consist in giving a part of ourselves or our possessions to God, but in giving everything, our whole life, to Him. That falls outside the definition of religion.
When Matthew 6:24 says that one cannot serve God and mammon, "serving God" is understood as living under the law. If "serving God" in this verse stands for "living under the law", then "serving mammon" stands for "living without the law". This is a reference to service under the New Covenant. It refers to our situation as believers who have been saved without the law and who live under another principle without the law. And that principle does not fall into the category of "religion". "Mammon" is used here to indicate believers who serve God not through the official form of religious service, but outside the law. That you cannot serve God and mammon therefore means that you cannot live at the same time under the law and under grace. The one cancels out the other.

Earthly Cares

Bible Study – Be Not Anxious (continued)Matthew 6:25 25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
This verse begins with the word "Therefore". It shows that it is directly connected with the preceding verse. In other words: because we cannot serve two masters at the same time, we do not need to be anxious about our life. Put another way, if we as children of God are in the service of the Lord, that automatically means we do not need to worry about our life. We should not be troubled about earthly matters such as food and clothing, but about life itself. Not about outward things, but about the essence of things. If we are anxious about things like eating, drinking and clothing, that is regarded as serving ourselves and that other master, the devil.
Being anxious about life is characteristic of human beings. Animals and plants do not worry about anything. There is nothing wrong, for example, with going to the supermarket on Saturday to buy food for the weekend because the shops are closed on Sunday. The passage is not speaking about this kind of short-term planning and sensible foresight, but about the general human striving to secure one's own future. When our life is focused on that, God is pushed aside and plays no significant part in our lives. Moreover, we are not really living if we are constantly occupied with providing for tomorrow. Life is, after all, an adventure. We must learn to accept the circumstances in which we find ourselves in this life. The Lord has promised us a safe arrival, but not a calm voyage. If our life were a calm voyage, we would learn nothing along the way and life would give little satisfaction.

That is why Scripture tells us how we should order our lives. Our future only really begins beyond this earthly life. We know that we shall be manifested with Christ in glory when He is manifested.

> Colossians 3:4
> 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

That is our future. That is what we should be focused on. But if at any time we do have cares because of our earthly circumstances, we may make them known to God.
Bringing Our Cares to the LordIn Philippians 4, for example, we read that we may bring our cares to the Lord.

> Philippians 4:6-7
> 6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
> 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

We may make all our cares known to God. We have His promise that He will provide for us if we seek to serve Him. He gives us what we need. But He decides what that is. After all, we are His servants and His property. He can do with us as He pleases.
It is necessary for the Lord to keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Why do we sometimes become anxious? The answer lies in verse 7: fear and anxiety spring from our understanding. We are anxious because we have understanding and can think ahead. Because of that we see things coming towards us. This makes us uncertain. The problems are not there yet, but we see lions and bears on the road. This is beautifully expressed in the following saying:
A man often suffers most
From the suffering he fears
But which never comes to pass.
Thus he has more to bear
Than God ever gives him to bear.
There are many things we do not need to worry about, because the Lord provides. But if we do become anxious because we cannot control our thoughts, then we may bring these things to the Lord. When we do that, they are no longer our cares. If we bring our cares to the Lord, we can lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Timothy 2:2). Then we receive the peace of God which passes not only our understanding but also all our cares. In this way our hearts and minds are kept in Christ.
We may therefore bring everything that troubles us to the Lord, so that we can focus on other, heavenly things. We are sanctified, set apart from the world and dedicated to the service of God. He has delivered us from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4). We should therefore put everything that concerns this world into perspective as much as possible. We have passed from death to life, from darkness to His marvellous light (see 1 Peter 2:9). We should therefore live as righteous people by faith and trust in our Lord.

Not seeking our own righteousness, but His righteousness:

> Matthew 16:24-25
> 24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

The word “save” in verse 25 means “to hold on to”, “to have a grip on something”, “to preserve” or “to arrange”. If you desperately try to make something of your life, you are guaranteed to lose control. Life then becomes a disappointment, because it does not deliver what you expected from it. On the other hand, the verse also says that if you do not take earthly life too seriously, you will find life there. Only when we no longer cling so desperately to life does it actually prove to have something to offer. This is true in general for the old man, but even more so for us as children of God. Matthew 16 is therefore speaking about the practical, everyday earthly life of both the natural man and the believer.

The thought that one must let go of life in order to find it again also appears in Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24 and even in Luke 17:33, where it is mentioned in connection with the return of Christ. There it is spoken to those who live in the days when the Kingdom of Christ will be manifested.

The truth about losing and saving earthly life is also set out in detail in the book of Ecclesiastes. We call the book “Ecclesiastes” (the Preacher). Unfortunately, in doing so a part of the original meaning disappears in Dutch. It is the translation of the Hebrew kohelet, which is derived from the word kahal. This does not mean “to preach” or “to proclaim”, but “to call out”. The Preacher calls his hearers out of the world, out of this present evil world (Galatians 1:4), so that they may be delivered from the “cares of this world” (see Matthew 13:22).

The whole book has as its subject that whatever one tries to make of life, it always yields a negative result. This is not because of man himself, but because of the nature of life under the sun, the nature of the old creation. It is crooked. Hence the rhetorical question in Ecclesiastes: “Who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?” (Ecclesiastes 7:13). The advice that follows is not to try, because it leads to nothing. Moreover, it is arrogant to think that we can provide for ourselves or determine our own future. We cannot. There is only One who can, and that is God Himself. The moment we think we must provide for ourselves, we put ourselves in God’s place.

The whole old creation is by nature subjected to vanity. This is called “the bondage of corruption” in Romans 8:21.

Romans 8:20-21

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

These words are addressed to born-again people, children of God. The purpose is that man should be set free from the slavery of corruption. The “vanity” in verse 20 refers to the emptiness or pointlessness of life. To be subjected to vanity therefore means to be a slave to the meaninglessness of life. That is the misery of the natural man and his thinking. Romans 8:20-21 is a short summary of the book of Ecclesiastes. The word “vanity” occurs frequently there.

Ecclesiastes 1:2-4

2 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

> 4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

One generation follows another, but the world does not change. Although every generation wants to improve the world, it never succeeds. The answer in Ecclesiastes to the question “Why are we here?” is “for nothing”. Our existence, from the standpoint of the old man, is meaningless. Only in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes do we read what does give meaning to life: remembering our Creator.

> Ecclesiastes 12:1 1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

Here on earth, under the sun, everything is subjected to vanity. We also read this in Romans 8:20. But the creation will be delivered on the Last Day (see Romans 8:22). The same thought is applied to the believer.

Romans 8:23 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

If it makes no sense to pursue ideals and ambitions, we might as well let them go. Instead, it is better to enjoy life and spend our days pleasantly.

> Ecclesiastes 9:7-10
> 7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.
> 8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.
> 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.
> 10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might [...]

The intention is that we should take pleasure in what we do in life: it should give joy, satisfaction and fulfilment. Every human being needs this. For the believer, enjoying life and living pleasantly also includes filling life with active, practical service to God. As children of God we should fill our hearts with the Word of God. That changes our way of thinking and our direction.

> Romans 6:13
> 13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

We should present our bodies to the Lord as living sacrifices, as instruments of righteousness. That is called “redemption”. A life in the service of the Lord delivers us from the meaninglessness of life. It makes our life meaningful.

The People of Israel under the Leadership of Joshua

In the history of Joshua we find a wonderful illustration of the truth that if you are willing to lose your life, you will keep it. Under Joshua’s leadership the people of Israel were to take possession of the promised land and the promised inheritance. The Lord had said to them:

> Joshua 1:3
> 3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

In this way the Lord gave the city of Jericho to the Israelites. Jericho is a picture of the old world. The Israelites did not have to fight to take Jericho. On the contrary: they simply marched around it without attempting to enter it. Moreover, they had to do this in silence, except on the final circuit. In this way Jericho was given to them. The only restriction was that the Israelites were not allowed to claim the riches and treasures of the city for themselves. They were not to gather treasures out of Jericho. Everything was accursed, which meant that everything of value had to be burned. With a few exceptions, for those things were devoted to the service of Jehovah (see Joshua 6).
After this the Israelites went to the next city, Ai. There things went wrong. Spies were sent out to explore the city. They returned and told Joshua that Ai was only a small town with few inhabitants. They advised Joshua not to send the whole people against Ai. In their estimation three thousand men would be enough. So Joshua sent three thousand men to take the city. But these men were chased away by the inhabitants of Ai. The spies had clearly made a wrong assessment. Joshua then fell on his knees and prayed to the Lord for hours. At one point the Lord told Joshua to get up, because there was something wrong in the people. Achan, from the tribe of Judah, had found various valuable items in Jericho, secretly taken them and hidden them in his tent. Among these things were two hundred shekels of silver, fifty shekels of gold, and “a goodly Babylonish garment” (see Joshua 7:18-26). Achan had therefore begun to gather treasures on his own initiative and on the basis of human thinking. It was probably automatic: when you come across riches, you put them in your own pocket. Achan is a picture of the Jewish people who wanted to be justified by works rather than by faith.
The whole history of Israel in the book of Joshua is a portrayal of the situation of the Church in our days. We have been promised an inheritance that the Lord will give us. Not on the basis of our own deeds, but on the basis of His promises. The moment we try to secure our future in this earthly life or try to obtain an inheritance by our own efforts, we automatically find “a goodly Babylonish garment”. When we become involved in worldly striving, we become entangled in the “cares of this world” (Mark 4:19), of which Satan is the god. The kingdom of the devil is Babel. Babel was the first great capital of the world. The thinking and striving of Babel are controlled by the prince of this world, Satan, and stand in complete opposition to the thinking and striving of the Kingdom of God. The thinking of Babel was the principle of all world empires. “Babel” is called “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” (Revelation 17:5). When we become entangled in the cares of this world, we come under the power of Babel and therefore under the power of the adversary. Our spiritual warfare then becomes a sham: the moment we should be fighting that spiritual battle, we flee, just like the men at Ai. There is then nothing to conquer. The Lord then gives us nothing, even though He has promised us much. But those promises are on the basis of faith and not on the basis of our own human striving.
The story continues. The matter with Achan was settled. After he had been put to death, the people tried once more to conquer Ai. The remarkable thing is that no miracles from God were needed this time, but a military strategy. Under Joshua’s leadership another group of a few thousand men advanced against Ai. As soon as the army of Ai came out to meet them, Joshua and his men fled. They let themselves be chased by the men of Ai far beyond the city without being caught. Then, at the Lord’s command, Joshua stretched out his spear. The men of Israel suddenly stopped, turned round and killed the

men of Ai. Meanwhile the city of Ai was undefended and the rest of the people of Israel could easily take it.
The history illustrates that if one is indeed willing to lose one's life (Ai-chai), one will find it. The Hebrew word for "life" is chai. There is probably a connection between the words "Ai" and "chai". Literally "Ai" is translated as "ruins" ("heaps"). Ai represents life here under the sun. Ai is therefore a picture of the present world, lying under the judgment of God. Nevertheless it is placed at our disposal and we live in it. Only when we let it go will the Lord give it. We should be content with what God gives us. In that way our life can certainly be liveable and pleasant. We should also enjoy it.
We should serve God during our life here on earth. The Bible teaches that God has made us competent to be ministers of the New Covenant already during our life on earth.
Bible Study – Be Not Anxious (continued)2 Corinthians 3:5-6 5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;
6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

Our Heavenly Father Cares for Us
Matthew 6:26
26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?
Birds do nothing to provide their daily food, yet the Creator feeds them. And if the heavenly Father takes care even of the birds, He will certainly give us human beings what we need. The picture of the birds is a striking description of how we should live: the Lord provides for us, even in outward things. All that is expected of us is that we seek the inward, spiritual things. Then everything else will be added to us.

> Matthew 6:27-32
> 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?
> 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:
> 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
> 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?
> 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?
> 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Verse 27 is not speaking about a person's physical height, but about the length of life. No one can extend his life by worrying. Verse 28 concerns clothing, which represents outward things. Here we are told that the flowers and the grass simply grow. They do not make their own clothing, yet they are beautifully arrayed. God Himself provides for them. Grass is actually worth nothing: it is here today, but tomorrow it perishes. Grass is also compared with man because of his transitoriness (see Psalm 103:15). But we may trust that the Lord will clothe us and therefore provide for us. We should trust in the Lord rather than in our own labour.

The natural man in general worries about food and clothing. But the heavenly Father knows what we need. And He not only knows it, but He also provides for it. The same thought is developed in verse 33.

> Matthew 6:33
> 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

God Himself provides for us, but the first part of this verse mentions a condition: we should seek first the kingdom of God. Seeking the Kingdom must have first place in our lives. In this way we have a useful purpose for our lives: seeking the Kingdom and the honour of God. By "the kingdom of God" is meant here the New Covenant. It concerns the Kingdom of God as it has come into being since and through the resurrection of Christ.

Furthermore, we should not seek our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God. Then all other things will be added to us, because our heavenly Father knows what we need. As children of God we should place our trust in Him.

This does not remove the fact that we have certain responsibilities in our life here. We should live in surrender to Him and in dependence upon Him. We do not know exactly how our life will unfold, just as Abraham obeyed in faith and trust in God, not knowing where he would end up.

> Hebrews 11:8
> 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Whatever the future brings, the Lord leads us. He Himself has prepared a future for us. He ensures that we reach it, on the condition that we surrender ourselves to Him. Our life should be directed towards this: serving Him, accepting the circumstances as they are, and making the best of them. We should live by the grace of God, even during our life here on earth.

> Matthew 6:34
> 34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Here we are also told that we should not worry about tomorrow. At most we should concern ourselves today with today. Yesterday is past, tomorrow has not yet come, and today the Lord provides.

That is biblical truth.

AMEN